

City Council of the Mayor and Council of New Castle
Special City Council Meeting at Town Hall
201 Delaware Street – New Castle
Tuesday – August 2, 2011 – 6 p.m.

Present:

Council President William Barthel
Councilperson John Cochran
Councilperson John Gaworski
Councilperson Ted Megginson
Councilperson Teel Petty

Also present: City Administrator Cathryn Thomas, City Planner Marian Hull, City Engineer David Athey

Agenda

Discuss with DelDOT proposals developed to address traffic issues within the City.

President Barthel said this is a follow-up to the public hearing held in May.

Joseph Hofstee, project manager, DelDOT addressed Council. He gave a brief project history and a project overview. The reason the State got involved was the City of New Castle expressed concerns with cut-through traffic. DelDOT had at least 10 meetings with the City, including two public workshops. The three main areas involved are Third Street and State Route 9; Sixth Street and State Route 9; and Harmony Street and Delaware Street and State Route 9. He briefly reviewed the planned changes in each area.

Delaware Street would be changed to right in and right out. The signal at that location would be removed. A new intersection would be made by extending Harmony Street up to Route 9. The extension would go from E. Sixth Street, making it the new main gateway into the City.

At Sixth Street and Ninth Street, a grass median strip would be installed to separate Sixth Street and Route 9. This aims to reduce cut-through traffic and remove the awkward intersection.

There have been roughly 40 crashes at the Sixth Street intersection over three years. The proposal reflects a dual purpose; there is also a safety concern.

DelDOT received feedback at the public workshop—65 attended, 33 comments received with seven in favor and 26 against. That is why DelDOT is back, to address the concerns and make sure the City still wants to go forward.

The first concern was the increase in traffic on 8th and 9th streets. Without any other adjustments, it would add 115 additional vehicles per day on those streets. DelDOT looked at possible options. One was on Route 9 adding medians to not allow left turns. It would reduce cut-through traffic and it would require residents to alter their travel slightly. Another option would make sections of 8th and 9th streets one way.

The second concern was people did not want to see the left turn access from Route 9 onto Third Street eliminated. A study in 2005 found on Third Street, 23 percent of vehicles were cut through traffic; on Sixth Street, 58 percent of the vehicles were cutting through; on W. Seventh Street, 19 percent were cut-through; and Seventh Street in front of the old Gambacorta, 71 percent of vehicles were cut-through volume. That is in the afternoons and evenings. If they close Sixth Street and don't close Third Street, Third Street becomes a much more attractive cut-through option.

The next concern was about the pedestrian crossing at Delaware Street and Route 9. People did not want it removed. DelDOT could look at a pedestrian-activated light.

Others did not want to see the Delaware Street intersection removed. Leaving both signals in place would defeat the purpose.

In summer 2012, DelDOT will be constructing sidewalks and bicycle facilities on Washington Street. It is going to make a free right turn on Washington Street and Seventh Street and put in facilities for a possible future signal, if warranted.

Councilperson Gaworski asked about the flooding at Sixth Street and Chestnut Street.

Mr. Hofstee said they are aware of the flooding and have talked with the property owner there. They are going to do drainage improvements there to help alleviate the flooding. That work is contingent on this project being done.

He said you have to make it more difficult for people to get into town to reduce people going through town as a cut-through. It is a tradeoff, do you want to eliminate cut-throughs or inconvenience residents.

President Barthel said the path forward will involve having City Planner Hull and City Engineer Athey look at this closely.

Mr. Hofstee said they have put the project on hold since the last workshop. DelDOT has money now to do the design and money for the construction of Harmony Street and Delaware Street for 2013. It is in the near future. The money is programmed.

Councilperson Petty asked about the impact on emergency access.

Mr. Hofstee said the design would provide access.

Councilperson Gaworski said it will increase traffic on Sixth Street two-fold.

President Barthel said that DelDOT must see this as the best option since it is what they are recommending. He asked if they looked at options.

Mr. Hofstee said they did look at options but there is not a lot of room to work with. Options are limited. There is not an alternative B and C.

City Engineer Athey said this might be a problem to which there is no good solution. He is not sure it reduces the overall volume in the City, if that is the goal. It just slices it differently.

City Planner Hull concurred with Mr. Athey. It is a matter of choices. She also brought up the issue of pedestrian access at Route 9 and Delaware.

Mayor Donald Reese arrived at 6:38 p.m.

President Barthel thanked DelDOT and said the City is going to have Ms. Hull and Mr. Athey look at it.

Drew Boyce, assistant director of projects at DelDOT, said they want to make sure it continues to move forward. They have paused to make sure it is doing the right thing. If the City needs more information to make an educated decision, it will provide it. Projects like this are tough, he added, not everyone will be happy.

President Barthel said the City will make a decision on it one way or another.

Administrator Thomas ask if DelDOT had preliminary numbers for construction costs. If it is going to spend a significant amount of money, it should not get just an incremental improvement.

DelDOT officials said it is roughly a \$3 million, which is federally eligible.

Councilperson Cochran said they want to make sure the residents of New Castle are happy with the end result.

Earl Carpenter, a resident of West Sixth Street, said his street has the heaviest traffic now and it is going to increase. It is terrible now. He asked about trucks that turn left on Harmony Street at Sixth Street. How are they going to turn?

Dorsey Fiske said Administrator Thomas' point about the costs was very well-taken. She suggested doing something about the flooding on Sixth Street. It is something that needs to be done.

Barbara Alfrie, of 203 Harmony St., said that for years she has had to live with tractor-trailers and tour buses turning from Second Street onto Harmony. What scares her most is with the changes everyone will have to go down Harmony. It would take the traffic down another residential street and down past St. Peter's grade school. It is a problem of shifting what is a nightmare now to other areas. It would be better if DelDOT spent their time and effort on enlarging Route 9 and working on Washington and Seventh streets.

Erv Thatcher, of 7th Street, talked about the road flooding on Sixth Street.

Mr. Athey asked if DelDOT looked at Citywide traffic calming.

Councilperson Cochran made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Councilperson Megginson seconded the motion. It passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 6:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Dickinson
New Castle City Clerk